

**SUMMARY OF THE  
TRANSITION COMMITTEE MEETING  
FEBRUARY 15, 2001**

The Transition Committee of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met on Thursday, February 15, 2001 at 1:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST) by teleconference. The meeting was led by its chair, Ms. Silky Labie of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. A list of action items is given in Attachment A. A list of participants is given in Attachment B. *The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposal for a clearinghouse and to discuss a proposed questionnaire for laboratories and Accrediting Authorities concerning their National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP) accreditations and inspections. The clearinghouse would be the focal point for any issues, concerns or questions about the NELAC Accreditation process for laboratories and accrediting authorities.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Ms. Labie welcomed the attendees and verified the names of those in attendance. The first order of business was the approval of Transition Committee minutes from the committees' last teleconference on January 10, 2001. Ms. Labie mentioned the completion of action items #1 and #3 from those minutes and with that the minutes from January 10, 2001 were accepted with minor corrections.

Ms. Labie recounted the need for a mechanism which would handle questions, resolve complaints, and take suggestions from both the laboratory community and NELAC Accrediting Authorities concerning such topics as the NELAC accreditation process, standard interpretation, and consistency among state programs.

**PROPOSAL FOR A CLEARINGHOUSE**

The proposal, authored by Ms. Labie, had been forwarded to each member of the committee for discussion at this teleconference. The proposal was briefly discussed and the committee agreed on several important changes to the clearinghouse proposal.

The committee agreed that the proposed Option 4, formation of a neutral authority to resolve conflicts, would be the best solution to the problem of laboratories' reluctance to provide feedback about the NELAC accreditation process. Such a clearinghouse would be a permanent mechanism for identifying and resolving issues between laboratories and their accrediting authorities, and between state accrediting authorities.

The proposal highlighted comments and concerns from the first set of NELAP accredited laboratories and accrediting authorities that must be addressed and resolved. The proposal grouped differing needs and showed how they could be met by forwarding to the proper NELAC committee and also where disagreements on NELAC Standard could be resolved.

The proposal addressed the current situation among laboratories and the need for various communication mechanisms for laboratories to begin a process which will improve accrediting authority and laboratory relations and ultimately help to improve data quality. The proposed mechanisms agreed upon by the committee were,

- 1) To add additional Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to the NELAC Hotline, and
- 2) A hotline to receive and direct problems/conflicts toward the most likely source of a resolution.

The committee discussed the proposed list of candidates to determine the most likely to be capable and willing to assist in forming a clearinghouse. Several committee members advocated the idea of forming a subcommittee under the Environmental Laboratory Advisory Board (ELAB). The committee felt this choice was best because of the non-voting position of ELAB, and the strong connection with NELAC.

Dr. Wilson Hershey downplayed the role suggested for ELAB as a potential group to sponsor or oversee a clearinghouse. Dr. Hershey acknowledged that the formation of a subcommittee under ELAB was a possibility, however resource availability and other issues make such a undertaking doubtful.

Mr. Jerry Parr suggested that sponsorship of a clearinghouse by either a nonprofit group or an EPA subcontractor was essential and discussed the proposed sponsors or NELAC-associated groups that might be willing to assume this responsibility. Mr. Parr will initiate discussions with the American Council of Independent Laboratories (ACIL) to inquire about the possibility of sponsorship of such a clearinghouse and report on any response at the next scheduled teleconference.

Ms. Labie will re-draft the proposal and forward it to the committee for discussion at the next scheduled teleconference.

## **DEVELOPING A QUESTIONNAIRE**

The committee agreed that a post-accreditation questionnaire for the NELAC laboratories would be beneficial to NELAC and to the accrediting authorities as well. Such a questionnaire would be useful in determining the state of NELAC accreditations and how well the NELAC Standard is doing in the field. Ms. Deborah Loring provided a draft questionnaire using some proposed questions from committee members but also gathered input from other commercial sources as to what types of questions are important to the laboratories. The committee discussed Ms. Loring's proposed questionnaire and agreed that only minor changes would be necessary. Ms. Labie will make the agreed upon changes to the questionnaire and forward the re-draft to the committee members for comments and corrections. The committee seeks to add this proposed questionnaire to the agenda of the NELAC Board of Directors for their consideration during their next scheduled meeting on March 8, 2001. Mr. Parr also indicated that the ACIL might be persuaded to distribute the questionnaire to their membership. However, Mr. Parr acknowledged he would contact Ms. Jeanne Hankins, NELAC Director, for her approval before moving on this idea.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Ms. Labie called for any new business the committee needed to address. Mr. Parr initiated a discussion concerning the possibility of a strategic planning meeting concerning the long-term plans and goals for NELAC. The suggestion came from Mr. Steve Billets of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and was directed to the Transition Committee and the NELAC Board of Directors. Ms. Labie will contact Ms. Hankins for her concerns on this issue.

## **FUTURE TELECONFERENCES AND ADJOURNMENT**

Ms. Labie called for any further discussion on current topics or new business, also reminding those in attendance that the committee will meet again by teleconference on March 15, 2001 from 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. (EST). With no further comments offered, Ms. Labie adjourned the meeting.

**ACTION ITEMS  
TRANSITION COMMITTEE MEETING  
FEBRUARY 15, 2001**

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Date to be Completed</b>
1.	Ms. Labie will re-draft the proposal for a clearinghouse for questions and arbitration for NELAC accredited laboratories and accrediting authorities	2/28/01
2.	Address the lack of secondary application package requirements in the NELAC Standards	Ongoing
3.	Ms. Labie will make agreed upon changes to the questionnaire intended for NELAC accredited laboratories concerning the process of their NELAC accreditation and where that process might be improved	2/28/01

**PARTICIPANTS  
TRANSITION COMMITTEE MEETING  
FEBRUARY 15, 2001**

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